



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

**Record of Decision
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Big Arm State Park Major Maintenance Project**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 1
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

March 16, 2005

Description of the Proposed Action:

The project proposes site improvements at Big Arm State Park. These include: the addition of two rental yurts, relocation of the existing park host trailer pads, construction of a new storage shed, relocation of the campground boat trailer parking area, construction of a handicapped-accessible campsite and accessible vault toilet in Loop B, the relocation of the day-use picnic and swim area from the middle of the campground to the day-use area at the south end of the park, and the addition of three tent sites to the area previously used for day-use picnicking. Additionally, the Loop A campground road will be bladed and graveled to improve the surface and allow for access by vehicles with limited clearance. The purpose of this project is to better utilize available open space, provide additional and variable camping opportunities, improve the visual quality of the campground area, and reduce traffic and crowding conflicts between day users and campers.

Public Comment:

The public was notified in the following manners to comment on the draft EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Six legal notices - two notices published one week apart in each of these three newspapers: Daily Interlake, Lake County Leader, and Missoulian.
- One statewide press release.
- Posting of draft EA and legal notice on the FWP web site: www.fwp.mt.gov.
- Thirty-day public comment period following publication of second legal notice.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope, having few impacts, all minor, and many of which can be mitigated.

Three written comments were received. One was totally opposed to the project. One was generally in favor, but had concerns over moving the picnic area. One was concerned over size and shading in the proposed new picnic area.

Key issues raised are listed below; a complete list of issues/concerns can be found in the project file and will be made available upon request.

- Moving of day-use swim area to the south end of the park will decrease size of the day-use picnic area.
The area of the relocation is actually slightly larger than the current site. No loss of acreage will occur.
- Insufficient shade available at the south end of the park at the proposed new swim area.
Shading is reduced at the south end of the park. This can be mitigated by planting trees for the future and incorporating shade structures over the picnic tables in the interim.
- Reduction of access to the lake by moving the swim area.
No reduction of access to the lake will occur. The proposed location is currently minimally utilized. This is simply a relocation to reduce crowding and enhance safety.
- Additional costs involved with relocating host pads and visibility.
The costs of relocating the host pads does not involve adding a lift station, and existing power and water lines are near to the new proposed locations, which will significantly minimize costs. Placing pads upslope, with vegetative screening, does not restrict access by visitors. Visual or aesthetic considerations in park areas is an important element in park management, and efforts to reduce clutter and maintain the naturalness of these areas is part of the state parks legislative mandate.
- Need for additional yurts.
Yurts have become very popular in the Northwest as an alternative to traditional means of camping. Idaho, Oregon, and Washington state park systems have had yurts available to the public for years. Part of our purpose is to provide a variety of recreational opportunities. The addition of two yurts would follow modern camping trends and help fulfill our mission. The addition of two yurts will make a total of three at Big Arm. They are the only ones found in the entire Montana state park system.
- Wrong time of the year to solicit comments.
The EA for this project was completed during the winter months to try and meet the scheduling demands required to accomplish the work this spring. During summers, planning is difficult to accomplish due to other demands during the high-use season.

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis in the draft environmental assessment (EA), I find Alternative 2, with modification (see attached modified Appendix C, Alternative 2), to be the preferred alternative. The modification entails relocating all three host pads to the upper road versus having one host pad along the campground entrance road. This alternative will meet the objectives of reduced campground traffic and improved utilization of park areas and resources. The alternative will also relocate camper boat trailer parking to the upper road

and relocate the swimming and day-use area to the south end of the park to improve safety and reduce crowding. Additionally, it will restore some areas to a more natural condition and enhance the visual characteristics of the campground.

I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies, and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620

James Satterfield, Regional Supervisor
Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One

Date

APPENDIX C

Alternative 2 (modified)

